

THE DUTY WHICH THE COLORED PEOPLE OWE TO THEMSELVES.

A SERMON

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Hebrews 11-24.

By faith, Moses when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Moses was the son of a slave, but separated from his own people in infancy, and adopted into the royal family of Pharaoh, he lost all external identity and relation with the race from which he sprung, and apparently all his earthly interests were bound up with the Egyptians, among whom he moved. He was regarded as the heir of the Egyptian throne. There was every conceivable inducement for Moses to separate himself from his despised and degraded people, and move as a noble, as a prince among the rulers of the land.

But the love of his own race was so strong, that he decided to turn away from all that the Egyptians could offer, the society of the wealthy, the learned, the noble, from the court and the throne, and be only a Jew, to share the reproach and disabilities of his people, to devote his energies among them, as one of them, to their deliverance and elevation, and in any event, to rise or fall with them, a Jew among Jews, rather than to leave his people to associate with another race, even though it would bring him wealth, pleasure and honor. He chose rather to suffer affliction with his

own people than to enjoy the pleasures, honors and riches of Egypt.

Perhaps he had even then discerned something of the purpose of God, that He had chosen for the Hebrews, not that they should be merged and lost in the more numerous Egyptian race, but should produce in a separate state, a nobler civilization of their own. Had Moses become king of Egypt, and had he given to his people such a position as would have melted them into the Egyptian mass, that light of Hebrew civilization which has been the world's guide for almost three thousand years, would never have been kindled, and the whole destiny of the world would have been changed.

A few days since, some remarks were reported to me as made by one of the most distinguished of the colored race in this country, which in substance were as follows: "I accept my position as a black man. I am not ashamed of my color, nor of my race. My people are degraded now, and for that very reason I link my fortune to theirs. I seek no separate association with the white race, to receive patronage from them. I remain among, and one of my people; my hopes are based on their elevation, and I expect to rise as they ascend

by the power of their own institutions, and to show what a black man may become as a black man, fully developed on the basis of his own individual and independent life."

Such sentiments will be judged according to the stand-point of him who judges. One may regard them as the utterances of a mortified and defiant pride; another may consider them as the opinions and feelings of one who believes that the highest welfare of the black race is to be sought, not by obliterating the characteristics which God has stamped upon them, as if He had made a mistake in creating them, but by subjecting them as they are to the best influences of intellectual and spiritual culture, and thus preserve their individuality, and build up for them a civilization which shall be the true outgrowth of the attributes with which God has endowed them, instead of a mean, weak imitation of another race.

The question of the future status of the black race in this country is as yet the central one in politics and religion, and every earnest christian and patriot is anxiously searching for the principles which should govern us in its settlement. We must decide what we should aim at in the elevation of the black race, and having determined that, by what the law of Christ demands, we can leave details very much to the progress of events. These are certain important points upon which all who truly seek the elevation of the black man are substantially agreed.

They claim that he is entitled to all the rights of a proper humanity, and that this should include all the political rights and privileges that other men enjoy. They admit that he differs from the white man in many particulars, but deny that he is to be regarded on that account as an inferior type of humanity. They claim that the whole field of human effort and enjoyment shall be open to him as to others, and then his social rank and position in society must depend upon his own exertions, and upon those usages which apply to other

men. They demand that he should not be excluded from business pursuits or places of amusement, nor from our schools or colleges or theological seminaries or benevolent associations, or from our churches; that there should be no rule which on account of his race or color would shut him out from that which other men enjoy; in a word that he should be freed, from every disability and hindrance, and then left free to work out his proper destiny with such assistance as his fellow men can give.

On these points the friends of the black men are substantially united.—But when all these things have been secured, what do we propose to do then, in order to promote the highest welfare of the race, what does the law of Christ require, what does the Providence of God indicate as the ultimate purpose of our efforts, and as the final position which the colored race will occupy in the land?

If I understand the character of Americans thinking on this subject there are two theories which divide those who are agreed upon all the points which have been mentioned, and who are equally the black man's true and earnest friends, and the only question between them is, in what manner can we best promote the highest welfare of the colored race?

One theory proposes such an intermingling of the races as shall sweep not only unjust distinctions, but all differences, away, so that the two shall be finally merged into one. To accomplish this, those who adopt the theory would gradually break up all separate organizations for the colored people, and in the churches, schools, colleges and associations of all kinds, educational and religious as well as political, merge them in the surrounding mass of the whites. Such persons would have no separate colored schools, seminaries or associations or churches.

The other theory proposes to give the black race an independent life and growth, which shall neither be cramped by pressure from the whites nor

sunk into inferiority by a subservient imitation of another race, and assuming that God made no mistake when he created the black race, it would take the race as it is, bearing the very impress that God has stamped upon it, and give it a culture and a civilization which shall be a separate growth of its own individual nature. It would hold the race so far separate as to promote its individuality and its life as a race, so that culture should result in a true African civilization, and produce a perfected black man, and not a weak and worthless imitation of the whites. Such would be the natural result of the present system of society. The colored people in their own schools and churches and various organizations, are making a progress in christian civilization which has no parallel in the history of man, while the relations between the races are harmonious and satisfactory, even affectionate, and it is a very serious question whether we should risk all this success in venturing upon a new experiment. The whole question must be settled by another. What does the law of Christ demand, and what course is indicated by the Providences of God?

In the discussions concerning the colored people too little importance is usually given to the distinctions of race. It is thought by some that these are to be abolished as civilization and christianity advance, and all will be ultimately melted into one. Others believe that the Gospel will produce for each race a civilization of its own, as each member of society retains his own individual character.

The influence of race is one of the great forces that shape the destiny of man, and after all our efforts it will control and determine the relations between the blacks and the whites. The division of the race into nations at Babel was a Divine appointment, and the manner in which these divisions perpetuate themselves in spite of all changes and convulsions, or the lapse of ages, shows that a great purpose of God is being answered by the separation.

More than four thousand years have passed, and still the great families of Japhet, Shem and Ham are in the world as distinct as ever. And what is more remarkable the subdivisions of these main branches maintain their separate characteristics with a pertinacity that nothing can overcome.

The Jews were held separate in Egypt, reserved by God for a nobler fate than to be merged and lost in the race of their oppressors. God made of them a great separate nation, held them apart for 1,500 years on the hills of Judea, and made them the fountain head of all modern civilization, and though they have been scattered and sown among all nations now for 1800 years he holds them still everywhere separate and peculiar, reserving them for the time when once more, a nation still of Jews, they shall be gathered to their own. For thousands of years the Arabs have preserved their race distinct. The Turks did not melt away into the European civilization in which they established themselves, and the Moors, after 800 years in Spain, went out as Moors, and left a Castilian race behind. The races that made the plains of the Euphrates and Tigris famous were quite distinct from those who created that wondrous civilization in the valley of the Nile. The gorgeous splendors of Nineveh and Babylon bear little resemblance to the gigantic solemn structures of Egypt. The Asiatics of India are distinct from those of China. China is different from Japan, and though these are only branches of one great family, and dwell almost side by side, they do not melt into each other, but preserve their individual traits, and have produced each a civilization of its own, perpetuating itself age after age.

The Greek race, trodden down for centuries by the Turks, has not mingled with them. God has held them apart, reserving them for the future, and now Greece is in the very act of rising once more to the dignity of an independent national life, to produce,

perhaps, more than the glories of the past, but still distinct and peculiar.

It is exceedingly instructive to observe how the races of Europe preserve their identity and peculiarities. Castilians, Franks, the Teutonic race, Italians, Slavonians, Scandinavians, Celts, they are living each a separate life, and each reaching out after a destiny of its own.

Some curious facts are worthy of note as showing the tenacity of this life of race. A thousand years have passed since the Norman conquest of England, but the revolution under Cromwell was essentially a battle between the Saxon and Norman blood, a quarrel of races—Saxon liberty against Norman aristocracy. The boast of the South is, you know, that our own rebellion was a conflict between the Norman blood of the South and the Saxon race of the North. The statement is not without foundation in fact. In the main the North and the South descended from different races, and the antagonism is not ended yet.

The Celts are scattered in all lands, but the Irish race scarcely mingles with any other more than the Jews, and the Fenian agitation is a struggle of race against race. In our cities Irish and Germans draw apart to their own churches. The Germans are really the only race that, on the broad scale, seems mingling with our own, and they are from the same family root, the old Teutonic stock.

The negroes have been with us for two hundred years, and in spite of all unnatural intermingling produced by slavery, show that they are still a distinct race not in color alone but in their mental and spiritual character, preserving the original traits of their people just as they were sculptured on the Egyptian monuments four thousand years ago.

The forces which are swiftly changing the face of Europe are the resistless affinities of race, and the power of traditional religions. The attempts to construct the map of Europe without regard to race and religion will all fail.

The three great races are withdrawing from each other and rallying to their natural centres.

The Latin races and the Catholic church are gravitating towards France. The Teutonic branch is gathering to Prussia and Russia is the Imperial Head of the Slavonians and the Greek church, while the Greeks of Europe and Asia are approaching the new birth of an independent nation. Thus race everywhere separates from race, and each seeks an independent and separate life, a culture and civilization of its own.

A moment's reflection will show us the beauty and wisdom of such a diversity in unity, nay its absolute necessity, if God would bring to perfection each noble attribute of humanity and form one glorious whole from the union of perfected parts.

We are wearied and disgusted with the constant repetition of the same thing, though it may be perfectly beautiful. If all the stars in heaven were of the same magnitude, at the same distance from us, and all equally distant from each other, there would be neither glory nor beauty in the sky. Beautiful beyond all expression is the spotless blue of that air ocean that lies between us and the stars. But how soon would the eye, even of the poet or the artist, weary in looking on that alone. If there were no drapery of clouds ever changing the form and hue of their glory, if starlight and sunshine, and moonbeams did not refresh us in recurring order, if there were no golden gates of the morning, nor gold and purple, and banners of flame to deck the evening sky, the heavens themselves were blank. Select the most beautiful flower of earth, and make that the only one in all lands, and it would be nothing compared with the infinite variety of hue, and form, and fragrance that delight us now. Give one human face the majesty and beauty of an angel, and shape all others to that perfect model, and we would weary even of angelic perfections. For the same reason it was and is necessary

that there should be a diversity of races, each presenting, in its own development, the beauty of its own flower, the perfection of its own fruit, the working of its own separate life in the great field of humanity, winning a victory and a crown of its own.

Hence, in the ordering of God for the nations, we have had the golden magnificence of Babylon and Assyria, and that more majestic structure of empire in the Nile valley, whose broken palaces, monuments, and tombs are an astonishment to the nations yet, and which sent down to us, through Greece, its science and its art. We have had that Jewish civilization with Moses to give to the world the elements of law and jurisprudence, its prophets to unveil the future, with David to supply the nations with the poetry of worship, with Solomon as the exponent of its literature and scholarship, and the temple as the golden crown of its religious art. We have had the beautiful Greece to bequeath its wonderful legacy of art, and eloquence, and song, and beauty, and Rome with her imperial dignity and her stately strength, and in modern Europe and America, each nation is adding some excellence, some beauty of its own, to the common crown of humanity. Asia too, with her hundreds of millions, stirs under the spell of christendom as chaos thrilled into life under the power of the brooding Spirit, and prepares for the new birth of christian civilization, an Asiatic civilization separate and peculiar, the proper outgrowth of her own individual life.

Friends, we have here the facts of history, the indications of God's Providence which reveal to us his will. Have they no teachings for us in regard to the questions at issue here? Do they not indeed pour a flood of light over the whole subject of discussion? Not only is it apparent that the races are held apart for some great purpose not yet accomplished, but these race affinities are shown to lie deep among the very elements of our nature, and they are strong enough to resist and dissolve all

political combinations and tear even Governments asunder.

The late elections furnish us with a very startling and instructive example of this power of race attachment. It has been used in the North to perpetuate a great wrong, but those who attribute the result of these elections merely to the old prejudice against the negro, mistake I think, the leading cause. I am persuaded that if the question of negro suffrage in Ohio, and other north-western States, could have been presented by itself—simply a question whether the negroes of the North should be permitted to vote—it would have been carried. But this question was adroitly changed for one that appealed directly to the pride of race, the question whether the white race should be ruled by the blacks, and this swept all justice away. Let any other race be placed politically in the same position that the blacks hold now, so that the question could come up whether they should rule America, and the vote would be overwhelmingly against them.

I think that many mistake in supposing that in proportion as mere prejudice is removed, and the blacks are cultured and elevated, the two races will be intermingled and merged in each other. I expect the exact contrary result. The difference of race lies deeper than prejudice, or ignorance, or degradation. The love of race is even stronger in the negro than in the white. It is not affinity for the white race which inclines the black man towards us now, but a desire to escape from the degradation of his people. Elevate the blacks upon their own basis of life to our level, and we shall find that they will be held apart, and to each other, by the resistless love of race. And it is well that it should be thus. Look at Africa, with her hundreds of millions of men. Has she no great separate part to play in this world's drama? Is there to be no such spectacle on earth as an African civilization, no such being as a perfected negro man. Look at the four and a half millions of her

sons and daughters here, and those more numerous millions in Mexico, the islands, and Central, and South America. Have these been wrenched violently away from her, and suffered what slavery can inflict of degradation and torture, only to be chained, when free, to the white man's car of progress, the poor weak imitators of another people, their highest ambition to yield up the life of their own race, and be lost in the fortunes of the white man? I think God is reserving the black man for a nobler fate than this. He has a sphere of his own to occupy among his fellow men, a work committed to him, a battle to fight of his own, a position and victory to win on his own independent field. The slaveholders' proud assumption that the negro belongs to an inferior race, incapable of reaching the full strength and nobility of manhood, has by no means lost its power, and just in proportion as the negro accepts this as true, will be his desire to escape from his own sphere, and from association with his own people, and connect himself with the white race, and thus try to diminish his stinging sense of degradation. I fully believe there is a more excellent way. I am no believer in the inferiority of the colored race. They are very different from the white man, they have a strongly marked individuality and capabilities of their own, but that does not prove them inferior. It is by no means a settled fact that the Caucasian race is the perfect standard by which all others are to be measured and pronounced good or bad according as they resemble them. Moses and the prophets, David and Solomon, Paul and the Apostles, Christ himself, were none of them Caucasians. The magnificent forests of the tropics are widely different from those of the North, but they are not inferior, and fill their own proper place among the earth's productions, and so the African civilization may belong to the tropics, and may be as necessary as that of the whites to make up the completeness of human development. God has made no mis-

take in creating the black race. Their peculiar traits were stamped upon them by the same love and same wisdom which made the white man what he is, and in the perfecting of human nature the African civilization may yet play as important a part as that of any other. The more I study the characteristics of the colored race the more anxious I am that they should have an independent culture and growth of their own. I do not think that the world can afford to have their individuality merged in that of any other race, or even by too close a contact to have it essentially modified. I am radical enough to believe that the world needs a distinctive negro civilization and an African type of christianity.

A race that amid all the ignorance and degradation of slave life, amid all bodily sufferings and the more terrible agony of the heart, could still maintain its hold on God may yet teach us something of the true nature of faith in Christ. A people that for two hundred years of darkness and hopelessness still lifted the fettered hand and trusting heart to Jesus may yet teach us something of the prayer of faith. A race that slavery could not crush out in two centuries has certainly a robust vitality that is worthy of cultivation on its own stock. A race with such an emotional nature has also the capacity for strong spiritual influences, for poetry, oratory, and art. A people that on many a bloody field has proved its heroic manhood can stand upon its own foundation with simply that cherishing support from the whites that christian love requires.

We cannot afford to lose the influence which a separate culture of the black race would produce upon us. We need the negro character as God made it, cultured and perfected, not modified and spoiled by a weak imitation of us; nor can the black man afford to be merged in and lost in the organizations of the whites.

My first advice then to the black man would be, be not ashamed of your

race or color. Dare to be a black man, and accept the position that God has assigned you, and do not believe that it is an inferior or degrading one. Be a black man. It is as honorable to be a black man as it is a white one. Aim to make yourself not a white man, but a perfect black man. Have faith in your race, in its capability and in its future. Give your presence, your influence, your support to your own race and color.— We can afford to have you with us, but you cannot afford to come. There is a better thing in store for you. Link your fortunes and your hopes of advancement to your people, and expect and strive to rise with them and by them. Refuse, like Moses, to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and give yourselves to the welfare of your own people and race. If I wished to hold the black people in a state of perpetual subordination; to place them in a second stage of slavery more galling in the end than the first was, I would try to bring out from among them the ambitious, the educated, the enterprising, such as are most inclined even now to come, and place them in little, powerless, subordinate minorities in the schools, colleges and churches of the whites, where their power would be lost, and their manhood sapped by the influences around them. And if all the organizations of the blacks were merged in our own, it would consign them to helpless inferiority of position.

There is a good illustration of this before us. Two years since these Congregationalists were scattered among other churches and societies, a few in one place, a few in another, with no connecting bond, merged in other organizations, a little minority at the best everywhere, and exerting no felt influence upon the city or the country. But they have been drawn out, combined and organized into a separate church, and they have become through this independent life, a power that is recognized as one of the forces of society.

If now we should break up this organization, and divide its members in

companies of five or ten among other churches, the power of Congregationalism would be broken, and it would die out of the community.

Another valuable illustration of the best method of advancing the black race is furnished by the war. Many objected to the formation of separate black regiments, and believed that the black soldiers should be mingled indiscriminately with the whites. On principle there could be no objection to this. The thing was right in itself, but if it had been done, the blacks would have lost the crown of battle which was to them the crown of manhood. They would have been scattered among the companies and regiments, lost in the general mass, and though every individual among them were a hero, it would have availed them nothing, every victory would have been a white man's victory.

But when separate regiments and brigades of black men marched steadily in the teeth of the storm of death, when they closed as quickly as white men the gaps torn through their ranks by shot and shell, when the black hand held as firmly as any other the stripes and stars amid the surges of battle, when the black heart poured out its blood as cheerfully as that which beat under the whiter bosom, then it was a black man's heroism and a black man's triumph, and this separate organization won for him a crown of manhood which his enemies and slanderers could not pluck away.

Therefore let them retain and strengthen to the utmost their own organizations, and throw none of their power away among the whites where they are certain to be overshadowed and lost in the greater mass. Let them assert and develop their own proper black manhood. The highest position which any creature can reach is to become what God intended him to be. The black man need not pine for a white man's crown. God has prepared one equally honorable of his own; but it must be nobly won by building himself up not into a poor imitation of the whites, but

into the perfect stature of a true black humanity.

The black race, if true to themselves, have before them, an honorable future. By cultivating the true life of their own race, and bringing out the peculiar power with which God has endowed them, they may produce here a civilization of their own which will be an honor to humanity.

They may give us orators, poets, musicians, artists, preachers, nay, men and women in every walk of life, that will be equal to the foremost. They may impart something of tropical magnificence to our civilization as the Moors and Saracens did to Spain and the East. They may give a deeper, richer, more fervent tone to American piety—and then when prepared, they may carry back to their native Africa a type of christianity better fitted to the millions there, than even our own, and then an African civilization on the grand theatre of a continent shall perform its work in the general elevation of man.

This subject presents two questions that are entirely distinct, and must not be confounded. One is, if a black man seeks admission to the church of white men, should he be rejected? Certainly not. Let him enjoy the same rights and privileges in this respect as other persons have. Christianity in this regard knows no distinction of color.—Another and a very different question is, in view of their own best interests and highest happiness should we induce

or advise them to come? Where they have no church organizations of their own that they can enter I should do so, but in a community where suitable churches and schools of their own people abound, I cannot conscientiously as a friend to the blacks advise them to avoid these organizations of their own, and bury themselves in a living grave, an unheeded little company in the larger masses of the whites. Every one taken thus from the number of the blacks diminishes to that extent their strength and their power of progress and elevation. We can afford to receive the colored people, but their own race cannot afford to lose them.

On all sides the elements of a true and noble African civilization already appear. Churches, schools, colleges, newspapers and other periodicals, benevolent, religious and political associations are formed, and everywhere they are rapidly shaping a complete social, educational and religious structure of society. In these, the black man works free and untrammelled, chilled by no coldness, wounded by no prejudice, and is growing up without hindrance or repression into a fully developed and independent man. The law of Christ demands of us that we should give them all possible countenance and support in these praiseworthy efforts, and in the end this African race will add new honor and strength to American civilization, and present perhaps a new type of christianity to the world.